

Reflections

Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Aftermath of Hurricane Laura, Lake Charles, LA

I received this cryptic note from Jim Serra:

"So are you ready to strap on your boots and head back to Lake Charles? We try to shake things up every 15 years."

It took me a while to remember Jim was a participant in the last Gateway before the pause. He is from Lake Charles and we shared a lunch together. I told him about my having flown from MN to Louisiana to help in the recovery efforts after hurricane Rita devastated his hometown. My job was to help small business owners adapt to their new circumstances.

I wrote him back: "Oh my goodness. I've seen many a video and plenty of interviews with residents of Lake Charles and they all say the same thing. 'Rita was a picnic compared to Laura.' I'm so sorry everyone is having to go through this all again.

I have several enduring memories of my time there helping small businesses recover from Rita.

- A sea of blue tarps covering roofs. I wanted to be in the tarp business. I coulda' made a fortune.
- The floating casino half beached.
- Graveyards on the coast wiped clean and all the caskets somewhere in the swamp.
- Whole swaths of the coast just scrubbed clean of structures. Not even a nail left of what were once homes.
- I have this memory of a waiter patiently, and with a big grin, trying to explain to this Minnesota boy how to pronounce "etouffee." Having never taken French, I was staggered how the spoken word had nothing to do with the written word. Which is not so odd, now that I think of it. The French originally settled Southern Minnesota, where I grew up. All of the place names that continue to this day are anglicized. Nicollet (the county where I lived) is pronounced, "nic' let" not "nic ooh lay." No wonder I had trouble.

Most of what I remember is the "can do" spirit of all the people I met. They were gracious, optimistic and willing to adapt. I trust the same is true today."